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Blake and Fuseli in a Student's Letter Home

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Minute Particulars

THE REV. DR. JOHN TRUSLER (1735-1820) Ruthven Todd

In his Preface to *The Letters of William Blake*, 2nd ed., 1968, p. 16, Sir Geoffrey Keynes mentions that Trusler "established a business as a book-seller with the object of abolishing publishers." A printer friend, Bernard Roberts, has recently sent me a booklet which he wrote and printed, *Writers and Printers in Clerkenwell*, Printed for their friends by The John Roberts Press 14 Clerkenwell Green London E.C. 1 [n.d.]. This contains further information about Trusler, "a clergyman turned printer and publisher, [who] was in a fair way of business in Red Lion Street during the 1780's, being also the author of *The Honours of the Table* and *The Principles of Politeness*. . . . Dr. Trusler also wrote, printed and published collections of sermons. He had the curious idea of printing these in a script type, so that a preacher would sound (so Trusler imagined) as though he

was reading from his own manuscript rather than from a printed book." Sir Geoffrey says that his "mind was wholly antipathetic to Blake's, and they could never have come to terms." It does strike me, however, that, if the business about the drawing "Malevolence" had not interfered, Blake and the Rev. Dr. might have spent a pleasant hour or two discussing the abolition of publishers, and also the unsuspected advantages of script as a type from which to read.

Ruthven Todd of Mallorca is well known as the editor of the Everyman Life of Blake by Gilchrist, and as the author of numerous books and articles on Blake and related subjects. The most recent is Blake the Artist (Studio Vista, 1971).

BLAKE AND FUSELI IN A STUDENT'S LETTER HOME Robert F. Gleckner

In a chapter entitled "English Painters" in the anonymous *Letters from an Irish Student in England to His Father in Ireland* (London: Cradock and Joy, 1809), two volumes bound in one, is the following passage:

As you have heard so much of Mr. Fuzeli, I fear you would suspect that I have negligently passed over his works, were I to omit mentioning him here. If such an apprehension did not operate, I should certainly scarcely think he merited posterity. I sincerely hope he will afford them more gratification than he does his contemporaries. He has a great admirer and defender, I believe the only one, in a Mr. W. Blake, a miserable engraver, and one of the most eccentric men of the age. This man has hailed him as the modern Michael Angelo. For my part, I have never seen a painting of Fuzeli, his Night-Mare excepted, which has certainly merit, which did not appear to be the crude efforts of a man writhing under an agonizing dream of indigestion.--Every figure appears to be a grave and mysterious caricature. The faces of his men are generally very livid, with their eyeballs starting from their sockets; and his ladies have as usually a greenish complexion. Their attitudes are always forced into painful distortion, and the feet of both sexes never fail to terminate in a tapering point, almost as sharp as the steel spur of a game cock.

In most of his works chaos seems to "have come again;" indeed, with such incomprehensible sublimity are his subjects sometimes handled, that the men employed at the academy

by the hanging committee to hang up the paintings according to their directions, previous to the annual exhibition, actually, by a most ludicrous mistake, suspended one of his pictures with the bottom upwards, from conceiving that the top was the bottom.

Fuzeli is a man of learning, and, in his academical lectures, some of which I have perused, much genius, ability, and depth of thought and reading, are displayed. It is to be lamented that he does not wholly substitute the pen for the pencil. This is the man who threw Cowper, the poet, into a relapse of melancholy madness, by saying that he was an incorrigible dog, for not immediately adopting some correction which Fuzeli made in his MS. prose translation of Homer. Indeed, I am told there is a moroseness and haughtiness in the spirit and manners of this man--both forbidding and disgusting. I do not, however, think his mind is as frightful as his pictures; though his pride sometimes gets the better of his reason.

The only indication we have of the author is in the Preface, which describes him as "an Irish gentleman, who lately prosecuted his legal studies in this country to qualify him for the Irish bar. . . ."

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